

## Suicide Ideation and Attempts

In 1997 suicide was the third leading cause of injury death among adolescents 13–19 years of age. However, many teens seriously consider suicide without attempting, or attempt without completing suicide. Among those adolescents seriously considering suicide, factors influencing suicidal thoughts may include depression, feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, and a preoccupation with death, but may not be related to risk factors associated with actually attempting suicide (1). Factors which may contribute to attempting suicide among adolescents include impulsive, aggressive, and antisocial behavior; family influences, including a history of violence and family disruption; severe stress in school or social life; and rapid sociocultural change (2). Substance abuse or dependence can be an important contributor in the escalation from suicidal thoughts to suicide attempts (3).

■ In 1999 one-fifth of all high school students reported having seriously considered or attempted suicide during the previous 12 months. Less than one-half of students who seriously considered suicide actually attempted suicide (8 percent of all students). Less than 3 percent of all students reported having an injurious attempt, that is, a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had been treated by a doctor.

■ Female students were substantially more likely to consider suicide than male students. This difference was identified for all racial/ethnic and grade level subgroups.

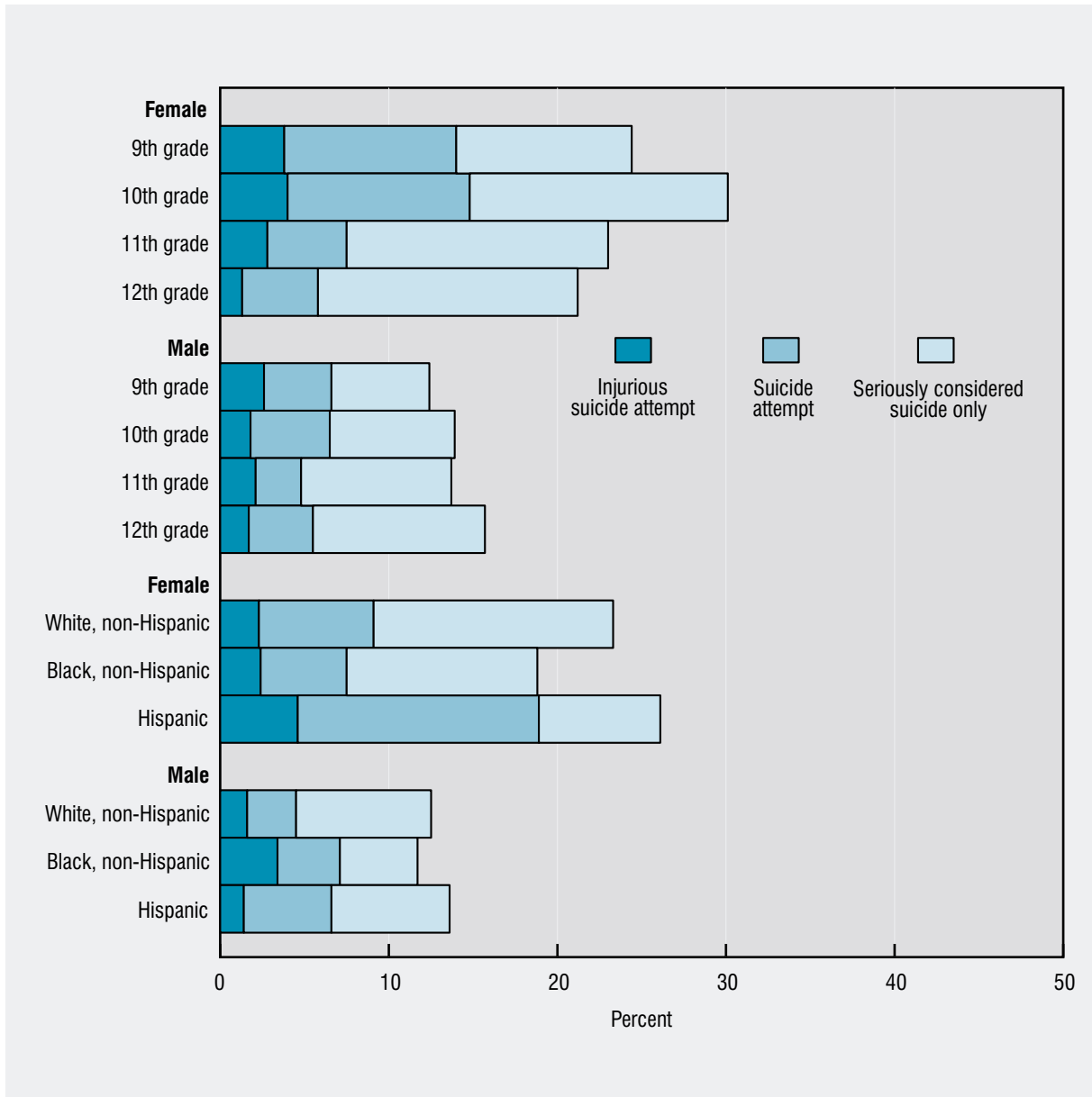
■ Although a substantial decrease in suicide attempts was apparent between 9th and 12th grade among female students, a decrease by grade level among male students was not significant. Suicide attempts among non-Hispanic white and Hispanic female students were significantly higher than among their male counterparts; among non-Hispanic black students there was no difference by gender. In contrast, the rate of completed suicides is higher among male adolescents than female adolescents (figure 16).

■ Healthy People 2010 identifies a reduction in the rate of suicide attempts by adolescents as a critical adolescent objective (4).

## References

1. Behrman RE, Kliegman RM, Arvin AM, eds. *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*. 15th ed. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company. 1996.
2. Goodwin FK, Brown GL. Risk factors for youth suicide. In: *Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration. Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*. Vol 2. Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration; DHHS publication no. (ADM)89-1622. 1989.
3. Gould MS, King R, Greenwald S, et al. Psychopathology associated with suicidal ideation and attempts among children and adolescents. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 37(9):915–23. 1998.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes)*. Washington: January 2000.

Figure 7. Suicide ideation and attempts among students in grades 9–12, by grade level, sex, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1999



NOTES: Response is for the 12 months preceding the survey. Among students attempting suicide, 6 percent did not report seriously considering suicide. See Technical Notes for survey methods. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).